


**Fall 2018**
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# AMBS window

## On loving our neighbors

**A conversation with students Benjamin and Rianna Isaak-Krauss**

What good would seminary studies be if they didn't help students carry out the two commandments cited by Jesus: to love God and love your neighbor? We've asked Benjamin and Rianna Isaak-Krauss to share about how their AMBS studies have supported them in loving their neighbors.

Benjamin, a Master of Divinity student from Bammental, Germany, is majoring in Theological Studies: Peace Studies. Rianna is a Master of Arts in Christian Formation student from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. As part of their AMBS studies, they're currently participating in the Sustainability Leadership Semester at Goshen (Indiana) College's Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center in Wolf Lake, Indiana.

**Rianna:** Recently I learned about a new dimension of loving our neighbor: "neighbors in time." At the **Sustainability Leadership Semester**, we're asking how we can love our neighbors in time — future generations, both born and yet unborn. This notion helps us think about global concerns like climate change and how our fuel-addicted lifestyle affects future generations.

While thinking globally is important, we can only love specific places. That's

why we're focusing on the scale of the Elkhart River watershed (a region where water that falls drains to a particular body of water). For example, if you take the Golden Rule and apply it to watersheds, you might say, "Do unto those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you." Taking into account that anything I put into the ground — trash, pollution or even fertilizer — goes downstream and can harm others in my watershed in a different location is a very real way of considering the Golden Rule. We are also learning about both our human and non-human neighbors and about how actions like drainage or damming impact their livelihood, which often has negative consequences for us as well.

**Benjamin:** So my degree program is MDiv: Theological Studies: Peace Studies, and you could say that peace studies is about how to love our neighbors. For me, moving between learning about and engaging in peacebuilding in different contexts and studying theology and reading the Bible has been really useful and has informed how I try to show up in different places.

For example, last year I took **Witness Colloquium** [with Janna Hunter-Bowman, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Peace Studies and Christian Social Ethics], which combines conversations about peace and mission. Semester One consisted mostly of listening to guest speakers from the community talk about what witness meant to them and how it affected their lives. In Semester Two, it turned into a class for local engagement, and that's how I got involved in initiatives that I probably would not have gotten involved in otherwise, such as the Elkhart County Sanctuary Coalition and the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

As part of the Poor People's Campaign, I led a Bible study where we looked at the last week of Jesus' life and the last year of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life [who organized the original campaign in 1968] and how those relate. This inspired me to write my own Bible studies on the themes of the campaign, reading the biblical

**Above:** Benjamin and Rianna Isaak-Krauss at a demonstration of the Poor People's Campaign at the Indiana Statehouse in Indianapolis in May. **Credit:** Thomas Frank

# ON LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS (continued)

stories and King's words next to each other, letting them interpret one another.

**Rianna:** A class that comes to mind is **Leadership Education in Anabaptist Perspective** [AMBS's orientation course], which helped us reflect on who our neighbors are through readings on intercultural awareness and undoing racism.

One form of loving people I focus on is through listening, pastoral care and healing work. Through courses in the MACF program, I've broadened my perspective of what pastoral care looks like.

The **Spiritual Practices: Play and Rest** class [with Allan Rudy-Froese, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Christian Proclamation] really helped me expand the concept of what Christian loving looks like — how playing and resting are both an intrinsic part of our faith and of our interactions as humans. Creating spaces where we can play and rest together is a core part of loving, healing and worshiping. Since that class I have been playing regularly with a group of people through InterPlay, a form of improvisational body wisdom, storytelling and movement.

**Benjamin:** As Anabaptists, one thing we highlight is reading the Bible in community. I took a number of classes with Mary Schertz, Ph.D. [Professor Emerita of New Testament], who always says [quoting Dr. Ellen Davis] that we need to learn to read the Bible as if our lives depended on it, because they do. She also models reading the Bible with concrete situations in mind. I got to write a paper about debt and how Jesus deals with debt

in the New Testament. Doing that work, which I followed up on in **Economic Justice and Christian Conscience** [with Malinda Berry, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Theology and Ethics] and **Spiritual Practices: Money** [with Rudy-Froese], helped me get more of a grip on how the economic system impacts people's lives, and it was grounded in this movement back and forth between the Bible and our real-life situations.

Last semester in **Political Theologies** [with Hunter-Bowman], we read about different approaches to how church and state relate to each other and how having religious convictions and being in a public space where not everyone shares those convictions relate to each other. As Anabaptists, through reading the Bible and worshipping together, we form an imagination of how the world is and could be, and that becomes part of our contribution to social movements for justice.

Over the summer, Rianna and I provided jail support for the **Poor People's Campaign** in Indianapolis — keeping track of those who were getting arrested as part of the civil disobedience, keeping a witness outside the jail as they were being held, and accompanying them afterward through their legal trials. A lot of it involves listening to people, helping them process the emotions and the stress. That's something we were equipped for through our formation in church and our studies at AMBS, where we always emphasize that peace depends on strong relationships of trust across difference.

## More about the Poor People's Campaign

- Rianna and Benjamin share about getting involved: [www.bennisblog.de/?p=2335](http://www.bennisblog.de/?p=2335)
- Rianna's reflection on her time in jail: [radicaldiscipleship.net/2018/05/22/why-would-i-do-this](http://radicaldiscipleship.net/2018/05/22/why-would-i-do-this)
- PeaceLab podcast interview with Benjamin and Rianna: [peacelab.fireside.fm/35](http://peacelab.fireside.fm/35)
- Benjamin's Bible studies on militarism and civil disobedience: [www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/23/19923](http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/23/19923)

**Rianna:** During the first week of the campaign, I got arrested [for nonviolent civil disobedience] and was in jail for 14 hours. That was something I'd been praying about beforehand with an intercessory prayer group at AMBS; they supported me as I was discerning whether this was something I'd participate in.

I joined Benni on jail support after that for about 30 hours per week, to be present with people and offer support and prayer. I realized the pastoral care skills I had practiced in my studies and ministry were useful gifts in this high-stress secular activist setting. We didn't necessarily share all our convictions, and we used different language, but it was still pastoral care. •  
— Annette Brill Bergstresser

## AMBS Window Fall 2018

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## Creation care at AMBS

- Build skills in **Environmental Sustainability Leadership** during a 15-week residency at Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center through AMBS's **Master of Divinity** or **Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies** program.
- Explore **Biblical Foundations for Creation Care** in an online Anabaptist Short Course (Jan. 9 – Feb. 19, 2019).
- Take **Spiritual Practices: Water of Life — Creation, Conservation and Faith** over five evenings on campus (January–April).
- Learn more: [ambs.edu/creationcare](http://ambs.edu/creationcare) •

**At right:** MDiv students Gisselle Guity and Marcos Acosta walk the prayer labyrinth on campus.  
**Credit:** Peter Ringenberg



## Teaching for God's peace and reconciliation



**Malinda E. Berry, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Theology and Ethics**

### What are your goals for students?

One of my goals is for students to develop the ability to assist people in their communities — from congregations to social groups — in reflecting theologically on the range of ethical issues they face. I also want students to be eager to develop theologically informed opinions by wrestling with Anabaptist peace theologies. I want to nurture their desire and ability to help others do the same.

### How does studying in your discipline prepare people to participate in positive personal, spiritual and structural transformation and in the work of reconciliation?

The theological task, as I see and teach it, involves work Robert King describes as recovering “a sense of the wholeness, the unity and integrity, of the Christian witness.” Slowing conversations down, avoiding the temptation to glorify the soundbite, and sitting in a circle are three things I have learned both from my disciplines and from teaching their content to others.

### How does AMBS's commitment to intercultural competence and undoing racism influence your teaching and research?

Because Christianity is a racially, ethnically and nationally diverse movement with adherents of all ages, genders and economic classes, I believe the sources my students and I look to in our reading, research, writing, teaching and learning are most faithful when they reflect this reality. As a woman of color in a predominantly white denomination

and teaching context, I consider it one of my responsibilities and joys to help others forge intellectual and spiritual connections with theologians and ethicists of all colors. •

*Malinda E. Berry is both a theologian and a teacher: she's passionate about the subject matter of her courses and believes that the content of a course should shape how it is taught. Her commitment to Anabaptism in the Mennonite tradition is evident in her approach to issues such as Christian social responsibility, environmental stewardship with an emphasis on human ecology, and renewing congregational life in its structural and spiritual dimensions.*

**Above:** Betsy Ayrea Delfine (far right) speaks with students in the 2018 Leadership Education in Anabaptist Perspective course during their visit to Church Community Services in Elkhart, Indiana. She directs the nonprofit's Soup of Success program, which provides job and life skills training for women in the region. **Credit:** Peter Ringenberg. **At left:** Malinda E. Berry. **Credit:** Peter Ringenberg.

## Your gifts at work

**Febri Kristiani, MDiv Campus student from Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia**



“AMBS is a place where diversity is welcomed and appreciated. Students are given the opportunity to learn and grow academically and spiritually, personally and in community with each other. I appreciate the relationships I've formed with other students, faculty and staff, each of which has

nurtured me in countless ways. As an international student, I've been blessed to be part of this learning community. Learning about God and the Bible and worshipping God with others from different cultures and traditions is life-giving to me.”

### Will you support initiatives to expand our reach to international students?

**Ben Parker Sutter, MDiv Connect student from Kansas City, Kansas**

“I decided to apply to AMBS as I was discerning what it would look like to leave a profession in which I was feeling unfulfilled. I was looking for something that

would connect to my faith on a day-to-day basis and allow me to play a larger role in a faith community during the week.

My spouse and I decided that part of that change would include moving halfway across the country and exploring living in intentional Christian community. Even though I was rather uncertain about whether it was the right thing to do, I felt God nudging me to try seminary out and see how it went. I'm so grateful that I did.”

**Donors fund more than 50 percent of tuition costs on average. Will you help to make fulfilling ministry possible for someone else?**

**Give online:** [ambs.edu/give](http://ambs.edu/give)





## PRESIDENT'S WINDOW

SARA WENGER SHENK

## No matter where you are from ...

**N**o matter where you are from, we're glad you're our neighbor." A simple, powerful message — in three colors and languages. I've spotted this sign in far-flung neighborhoods all across North America. There's no way to know how many have been produced and distributed. One modest estimate is 150,000.

I have a family connection to the sign. Following the bombastic bluster of the first debate among the Republican candidates for president in August 2015, my pastor son-in-law, Matthew Bucher, asked that a sign be painted and posted on the front lawn of his congregation, Immanuel Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He chose Arabic, Spanish and English because those were spoken most in the neighborhood. About a year later, members of the congregation and district collaborated to reproduce the sign for sharing at a Mennonite Central Committee relief sale — and the rest is history. Countless stories have poured in about neighbors stopping by homes where signs are posted to express tear-filled gratitude.

I've long admired the public ministry of "Peace Pastor" Marty Troyer (MDiv 2008) and Houston Mennonite Church. A recent Facebook post caught my attention, with "mugshots" of congregants each holding a mug with a message. One mug said, "Jesus told us to love our enemies." The accompanying observation was that "Jesus died exemplifying this teaching, and it changed the world forever."

Public messages of hospitality speak a consequential word of witness — especially powerful in today's fear-laden frenzy of racialized hatred. And it takes real people to put skin on neighbor love. At AMBS, we educate followers of Jesus to be healthy, down-to-earth human beings. When grounded in the vulnerable humanity we all share, we grow as leaders prepared to welcome neighbors no matter where they're from. Leaders, who like the Samaritan in Jesus' story, *show mercy*. Leaders who anoint and bandage wounds, bring injured persons to shelter and pay the costs. Leaders who in their mercy-filled humanity look like Jesus. •

## RESOURCES TO NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS



**biblioteca**  
DIGITAL ANABAUTISTA

### AMBS collaborates to provide Spanish Anabaptist ebooks

Biblioteca Digital Anabautista — a free, openly available collection of Spanish Anabaptist ebooks — is now online! The nucleus of the collection consists of materials from SEMILLA, the Latin American Anabaptist Seminary in Guatemala. "We're thrilled to be one of several partners in this ongoing effort," said Karl Stutzman (pictured), Director of Library Services. [biblioana.org](http://biblioana.org)

### Pastors and Leaders 2019: "Loving Our Neighbors in Tense Times"

Feb. 25–28. How do we respond to hate, intolerance and systemic racism in productive, transformative ways? What does the gospel of Jesus Christ call us to do in situations like these? We'll explore the biblical and theological grounding of our call to get involved and become equipped to lead — right here, right now. Speakers: Andrew Draper, Ph.D.; David Hooker, Ph.D.; Maren Tyedmers Hange, M.Div. [ambs.edu/pastorsandleaders](http://ambs.edu/pastorsandleaders)

### Online Anabaptist Short Courses (noncredit)

- **Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture: What's Different and Why?**, with Loren Johns, Ph.D.: Jan. 9 – Feb. 19
- **Biblical Foundations for Creation Care**, with Ben Ollenburger, Ph.D.: Jan. 9 – Feb. 19
- **Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication**, with Betty Pries, M.T.S.: Feb. 20 – April 10 [ambs.edu/shortcourses](http://ambs.edu/shortcourses)

### David Miller available to consult, teach, preach

Looking for help with sticky leadership problems in your congregation? **David B. Miller** brings pastoral wisdom, theological depth and years of ministry experience to bear on challenges facing congregations and communities. To set up a consultation, email: [churchleadership@ambs.edu](mailto:churchleadership@ambs.edu)

### Wrestling with Scripture?

The distance-friendly Journey program will equip you to see the Spirit at work in the midst of significant cultural, theological and educational diversity. Register by Dec. 14 and save \$100! [ambs.edu/journey](http://ambs.edu/journey)

### Take a course at AMBS!

Jan. 8 – May 3. Online, hybrid and campus courses include God's Shalom and the Church's Witness; Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations; Global Anabaptist-Mennonite History and Theology; The Corinthian Correspondence; Discerning and Knowing; Faith Formation and Spirituality: Adults and Seniors; and more. Nonadmitted students get 50 percent off their first course! [ambs.edu/onecourse](http://ambs.edu/onecourse) •